






Pencil Grasp Development

Mark making and learning letters

	When your toddler first grabs a thick crayon and puts it to paper (hopefully not to your walls!), this is the grasp you should be seeing. It is a “ fisted grasp ”, and your toddler will be using movement from the shoulder to get the crayon to move across the paper.
	As your toddler gains more control over arm and hand muscles, you will see this “ palmar grasp ” being used. Here, the pencil lies across the palm of the hand and your child’s elbow is held out to the side a bit.
	The shoulder muscles are steadier, and your child is using the arm muscles to move the crayon around , as well as the shoulder muscles. This photo shows a toddler using a palmar pencil grasp.
	The next stage is what is misleadingly called the “ immature ” 5-finger pencil grasp – it is immature because it is not the 3-finger grasp that is used in school, but it is a perfectly mature grasp for a 4-year old! As you can see, there are 5 fingers holding the pencil.
	By age 5-6, or even a bit later with some children, they should be comfortable using a mature 3-finger pencil grip . At first, the fingers will be held stiffly and your child may still use wrist movements to draw and color, but as the finger muscles become more skilled, your child will be able to use finger movements to draw and to form letters.

You do not need to teach your child the letters before they start school. We start at the beginning and teach all the children at their pace. However some children do develop an interest in letters and sounds before they start school and are keen to start forming letters and sounding out words. **If your child is keen...take advantage!**




Hand Gym

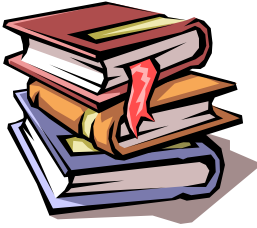
These activities strengthen the muscles in the hand used for writing and are designed to help children develop good pencil grip and control. Please supervise your child when completing these activities and be aware of the dangers of elastic bands and tin foil etc.

Whole hand strengthening

1. Place palms of hands together, fingers spread. Keeping the fingers pressed together push the elbows out and the heels of hands down. Repeat five times
2. Squeeze a small sponge ball or a small ball of screwed up paper
3. Roll a square of tin foil into a ball using writing hand only (scrap paper works as well)
4. Throw a ball into the air with one hand and catch with a plastic cup held in the other hand
5. Use empty squeeze bottles e.g. fairy liquid bottles to blow a ping pong ball across the floor
6. Put a strong elastic band around finger and thumb of writing hand open and close fingers to stretch hand muscles
7. Make a collection of plastic containers with screw top lids. Vary the level of tightness by using different plastic bottles and containers
8. Cutting activities- Draw a straight line or wiggly lines on scrap paper and ask the child to have a go at cutting along the line


Finger Strengthening

1. Flick a ping pong ball or rolled up ball of tin foil across the room as far as possible
 2. Lay a bandage across a table. The child traps the end of the bandage between the wrist of their writing hand and the edge of the table. Using only their fingers in a walking motion they try to gather up the whole bandage under their hand
 3. Heels of hands together and fingers curled the child tries to touch the corresponding fingertips one at a time
 4. The child tries to move the fingers as though playing a piano. The corresponding on each hand should be used
 5. Use the thumb and forefinger of the writing hand to open and close washing line pegs
 6. Use tweezers to pick up small objects e.g. bits of string, wool, rice, peas or beans,
 7. transfer small objects e.g. lentils, peas, small Lego from one pot to another using thumb and first finger
 8. Threading - beads/penne pasta on to thin string
 9. Pegboard/Hamma beads activities
 10. Open and close poppers
 11. Undo and do up buttons
 12. Wind up toys
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Pre-reading and writing activities to support your child





Pre-Reading and Writing Activities

When learning the letters and sounds children have to learn to distinguish between different sounds and then learn to recognise and match the written letter to the sound.

Hearing sounds

Distinguishing everyday sounds in the environment e.g. birds cheeping, cars on the road,

- Sound Lotto Games are really good at assessing a child's ability to listen carefully and distinguish between sounds

Hearing and Recognising Rhyme in stories and poems

- Recognising rhyme through nursery rhymes and repetitive rhyming stories
- Children remember rhyming sentences or predict the end to a rhyming sentence
- Make up nonsense rhymes and silly sentences

Writing for a purpose

- You can involve your child in writing shopping lists (Encourage your child to first identify the initial sound. Can they record the initial sound? Can they hear any other sounds in the word?)
- They could also add their names to greeting cards (Please always use lower case letters and check how to form letters please refer to letter formation booklets.)
- Write letters/words in shaving foam, flour, sand, etc. (pour substances into a shallow baking tray and cover the base)

Join the local library

- Increase your child's access to books encourage your child to select their own books
- Lead by example show your child that you value books/newspaper/magazines and enjoy reading.

Find time to read

- Set aside a good time to share books. Bedtime is not usually the best time for this age **BUT** bedtime stories are!
- Read stories more than once children learn a lot from hearing stories again and again. It gives them confidence to retell stories from memory

What can you do to extend a reading session?

- Make up different endings/Make up the next story or stories if there was a series
- Make story characters and act out the story

To help your child learn the sounds

- Play I spy (using the initial sound not letter names)
 - Pick out letter shapes in books, newspapers, comics and alphabet jigsaws.
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